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15 September 1989

Grey,

You've written an excellent paper in that a) it does justice to all the sources of the current crisis, and b) it is true to the title/subject. I have a few comments in the text, mostly on choice of words.

Otherwise my reactions tend to be thoughts for a somewhat different paper, namely, "with the USSR", scenarios, outcomes, the search for a Soviet future informed by the truths of Plato, Hobbes, Locke, and the Grand Inquisitor. I suspect many of the comments you'll get will be of this character and you can defend the integrity of your paper by appealing to its more limited but very timely purpose.

Nevertheless, here are a few of those thoughts. Reflecting on them you might reconsider a point here or there.

Your conclusion is that the longer Gorbachev's hews to course the harder will it be to reverse fully. It is also true, however, that the more costly will be the instabilities he engenders and their consequences, either social revolt or reactionary crackdown. Does the process ever get out of the danger zone?

My sense is that, if present trends and processes continue, the likelihood and intensity/bloodiness of revolt or crackdown (and either could produce the other as well) rises steadily and the prospects for peaceful evolution steadily diminish. But if revolt or crackdown are somehow avoided -- because of Gorbachev's personal strength inside the Kremlin, the growth of "alternative" but more or less in-system sources of legitimacy (e.g., SUPSOV, strike committees, popular fronts), and the absence of a real competitor platform/organization on either side -- then there is some possibility that perestroika could emerge into a more self-sustaining phase of diminishing dangers. Post-Tito Yugoslavia (don't laugh) may be the only thing like a model we have for this, and its fate is uncertain. The point is that because his odds of success are low and shrinking does not mean he is bound to fail, although I suspect ultimately perestroika must dump Gorbachev because his model is a violation of human nature and the laws of political economy.

As to implications for the US, I think you might make a couple of things clearer.

Whatever happens, the instabilities accumulated before and unleashed by Gorbachev will not abate for a long time, even under a crackdown. For example, Stalin's system wasn't really in place until about 20 years after the Revolution.

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This means that for a long time, it is unlikely that the Soviets will be able to run the kind of arsenal state economy that generated the familiar Soviet military threat of the post-WWII era.

But at the same time, the USSR will remain capable of dangerous and politically repugnant behavior and may become less predictable in international affairs, especially in Europe, and even more especially in East Europe. This will create the most awkward situation in which everyone is very nervous about Soviet developments but very nonchalant about defense. This will place a premium on political leadership in Washington and efforts at harmonious if not unified Ostpolitik in the Alliance.

Instabilities in the USSR are bound to hasten the shakeout of a post-Communist East Europe. This means a post-Yalta arrangement of some kind. Here is where we shall face the most severe foreign policy and strategic challenges. The US will not simply be able to leave it to chance or to the Europeans.

The political question of how to help Gorbachev or other "good guys" will remain on the agenda and become more pressing unless we see a crackdown.

As regards the usual constituents of detente, you are right to say that instabilities assure Gorbachev's continued interest in peace, threat reduction, and Western good will. But the West will face continued uncertainties as to whom and what it is dealing with. This will strain our domestic and alliance decisionmaking.

By the way, don't be surprised if you get some resistance to publishing this paper on the 7th floor. There is a strong mood in the Administration to avoid anything that smacks of betting against Gorbachev, rooting against him, or might leave us open to these charges. I would vote for going ahead, but that's only one vote.



Fritz

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